



**Judiciary of
England and Wales**

REX

V

CLIFTON GEORGE

SENTENCING REMARKS OF MR JUSTICE CONSTABLE

1. Clifton George, you may stay sitting down whilst I take some time to explain the sentence I am going to pass. The provisions of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992 apply certain matters I must refer to. Under those provisions, where an allegation has been made that a sexual offence has been committed against a person, no matter relating to that person shall during their lifetime be included in any publication if it is likely to lead members of the public to identify them as the victim of these offences. This prohibition applies unless waived or lifted in accordance with section 3 of the Act.
2. On 17 June 2025, you murdered Annabel Rook, the mother of your two children and your partner of over a decade. You brutally stabbed her 31 times. Although from the outset you accepted that you had killed Annabel, you claimed that you had lost control, and denied murder on the basis of the statutory partial defence of loss of self-control pursuant to sections 54 and 55 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. As required by the law to do, I considered whether, after careful analysis, there was sufficient evidence for that defence safely to be left to a jury. I decided that there was insufficient evidence under each limb of the statutory test. The remaining issue for the jury was what your intention was when you killed Annabel. After deliberation, the jury unanimously convicted you of murder. You have also pleaded guilty to one

count of arson being reckless as to whether life is endangered. The facts I take account of in sentencing you today are facts of which I am sure having heard all the evidence.

3. During the trial, a coherent and strikingly consistent picture has emerged of Annabel Rook. She was perceived by those who knew her as kind, attentive, funny, and altruistically motivated, someone whose instinct was to support, to listen, and to improve the lives of others. That she tried to see the best in people, becoming a mother figure to those around her and offering reassurance and guidance in difficult personal circumstances, was borne out not just by the witness testimony, but shone brightly from the many whatsapp and text messages, and in particular her voice notes, read and heard during the trial. Professionally and socially, she was committed to helping others. That sense of purpose shaped her entire life, and was reflected in her successful charity, Mamasuze, set up to create spaces to support vulnerable women.
4. At the outset, I pay tribute to family and close friends of Annabel Rook, particularly those who gave evidence during the trial. They remained in Court throughout much of the evidence with dignity, forced by the denial of guilt to listen to the distressing circumstances surrounding death of their beloved daughter, sister, and devoted friend.
5. The victim impact statements of Annabel's parents, her siblings and her close friends have been read to the Court. The strength summoned by each to provide those statements is a testament to their love for Annabel. No summary of that evidence can do justice to the depth of grief they describe. Each echoes their understandable devastation at the loss of such a bright, vibrant and irreplaceable human from their futures. The impact on their own, and their families', health and psychological wellbeing has been considerable and will continue. The continuing effect of your incomprehensible actions are felt minute by minute and hour

by hour. Those acutely involved in what happened in the early hours of 17 June suffered their own particular trauma. All describe how your actions have ripped away the innocence of your own children and those they spent their days playing with. To borrow the words of one, it will be a life's work to rebuild their sense of trust and safety.

6. Their statements evidenced the wider impact of your crime, the effects of which have resonated within the community Annabel lived and worked in, by the women she supported, and particularly by those living with the fear of male violence against women. Some underlined, as Annabel herself would have wanted, the importance of not seeing this particular tragedy within an interracial family as a reinforcement of racist views in a world where domestic violence exists, regrettably, across all communities and cultures.
7. It is obvious that the gaping hole in the lives of the Annabel's family, dear friends and community will remain for all time. The sentence you get will not bring Annabel back.
8. In contrast to Annabel, there are two sides to your personality, Clifton George. Annabel's family, and the social circle you shared with Annabel, recognised that you could be fun and friendly, and generous and engaging within friendships. You could be affectionate and attentive, and you could be great with children including your own sons who you plainly adore. It was your ability to make people laugh, including Annabel, which initially endeared you to them and which, as the Court has heard, was a key factor in Annabel falling in love with you over a decade ago.
9. However, having heard all the evidence, I am left in no doubt that there has always been another troubling side to your character. An overwhelming picture has emerged of your regular anger and volatility. Numerous witnesses described your pronounced temper with reactions that could escalate rapidly, often sparked

by petty or insignificant perceived slights. I am also sure, particularly on the basis of the heartrending notes to herself left by Annabel on her phone which she had no reason to believe would be read by others, that you were at times controlling and emotionally abusive.

10. This aspect of your character was evident from the outset of your relationship with Annabel, which started over 12 years ago. Once you had both decided to commit to an exclusive relationship, you moved in to Annabel's house. Not long after that, Annabel fell pregnant with your first child together. Even then there were signs of your inability to control your temper. The one time even you accepted that you were physical with Annabel during your loss of temper was when she was seven months pregnant. Having listened to all the evidence, I am sure that there were at least a few other times, as Annabel had related to her friends, when in private your anger crossed the line from shouting into physical intimidation. I am sure that this was an occasional rather than a regular feature of your anger.
11. No doubt driven in large part because of this side of your personality, it became increasingly clear to Annabel that she knew that you and she had to separate. That she did not do so sooner, as is made clear from both the messages she sent to others and her own internal notes, was because of your children and Annabel's overwhelming desire to minimize their pain and anxiety.
12. Matters came to a head in the months before June 2025. An adult relative from your side of the family, to whom I shall refer as X, had chosen to confide in Annabel about an extremely serious and distressing event of a sensitive and personal nature. X sought Annabel's guidance and support. X saw Annabel as a mother. You were also very close to X. X did not give permission to Annabel to speak to others about it, but she was also clear and specific in her instruction to Annabel that she must not disclose the information to X's father until such time as she was ready to

tell him herself. X was also specific that Annabel should not tell you because she feared, most probably correctly, that you would tell her father. This placed Annabel in an obviously difficult position. Annabel was torn between respecting X's wishes and the knowledge that X's father, and indeed you, would want to know what was causing X distress. Annabel turned, confidentially, to her sister and closest friends for advice. From the outset, she urged X to share the information with her father.

13. The pressure on Annabel became immense when X's father came to know that X had confided something in Annabel, but had not himself been told. At this point X's father placed considerable pressure on Annabel to tell him what had happened. Annabel remained true to X's instruction that it should be she who told her father, and only when X was ready to do so. Under this pressure, Annabel then turned for advice to her father, Peter Rook, a lawyer and retired judge with considerable experience in the very matters that were troubling X. He reassured Annabel that respecting X's wishes was the correct course, and encouraged her to continue to persuade X to tell her father.
14. Eventually, that happened. I do not doubt that X's father and, indeed, you both felt distress when you found out what X had gone through, and, because of X's own decision not to tell her father for some time, that you felt bad that you had not been able to provide X with support. You inevitably came to know that Annabel had been told a number of months before. You became fixated on the fact that Annabel had known when you had not. You turned all your fury at what had happened to X onto Annabel.
15. Annabel also told you that she had confided in her father. She told you that X had given her permission to do so, even though this was not true. Annabel also kept from you that she had also confided in a small number of others. I am sure she said these things because she did not want to make you even more angry. When you grilled X about this, and found out that Annabel had not been given permission by her to confide in anyone else, you

were even more furious with Annabel. This was wholly misplaced, particularly in circumstances where, as X herself testified, she had no difficulty with the fact that Annabel had felt the need to confide in others. X's only concern had been to be able to tell her father in her own time. You displayed a striking absence of empathy for X's own wishes or understanding of the obviously conflicted position in which Annabel had been placed. It goes without saying that it X bears no responsibility for the manner in which you chose to react to her choice of confidante.

16. In the heat of your simmering anger about this issue, Annabel resolved that she had finally had enough. On 8 June, she told you she wanted a trial separation and asked you to think about moving out. You replied it would not be a trial. In the coming days, Annabel determined that she would support you financially in finding a flat nearby so that you would be in the best position to co-parent the boys. You appeared to accept that you had no entitlement to force a sale of the house, which had always been owned by Annabel, or to any share of it even though you thought Annabel had agreed in the past to give you half.
17. You went away on a long planned trip on the weekend with your friends. You came back hungover and tired. You had taken two days off work to recover.
18. You were drinking in the afternoon of 16 June 2025. At 4.11pm you said to the group of friends that you had been away with that you had two glasses of wine. Although you denied it, I am sure that you carried on drinking. At 19.45, in the last message Annabel ever sent, she said, '[he] is drinking which I don't like'. There was no reason for Annabel to have said that if it was not true.
19. You and Annabel had another argument in which you remained angry that Annabel had confided in others, and in particular members of her side of the family, about what had happened to X, when she had not told you or X's father. No one apart from

you will know precisely what led you to violence that evening, but I am sure from everything I have heard that it is untrue that the first physical contact was a push from Annabel. She feared you and your wrath and to escalate the row in that way that would have been completely out of character. In any event, you admit that you started punching Annabel and then that you were on top of her strangling her. You were shouting 'You lied, you lied' at Annabel. I am sure the only thing on your mind was your grossly disproportionate sense of grievance that Annabel had confided in others about what had happened to X. Having heard all the evidence about Annabel's clear and single-minded intention to achieve amicable co-parenting arrangements after your separation, I am sure that whatever may or may not have been said during your row, Annabel did nothing from which you could have seriously believed you would be anything other than the weekend dad you knew you were about to become.

20. At one point you stopped strangling Annabel, and made the deliberate choice to retrieve a weapon. You went to the kitchen and returned with a knife. It is a grim fact that, given your love of cooking, this had been a thoughtful present from Annabel a few years previously. You returned and, in your rage and fury, brutally stabbed Annabel to death. There were a total of 22 stab wounds to her body. There were 9 further defensive stab wounds to Annabel's arms. At least 5 stabs were administered with severe force. The deepest of these penetrated to a depth of about 11 centimetres. The most serious of all these wounds was one to the right breast which passed through the right lung and into the right ventricle of the heart. From that moment, she did not have long to live. The pathological evidence demonstrated that some of the injuries to the abdomen had been caused after Annabel's collapse.
21. You say that in the hours that followed you made various unsuccessful attempts at killing yourself. You took a knife to your wrists, but evidently failed to cut a major artery. At around 4am you resolved to cause an explosion at the house, you said this was also to kill yourself. You retrieved a propane cylinder from the

BBQ and, opening the valve, took it to the basement, located directly under the sitting room where Annabel's body lay. You lit some kitchen towel and dropped it down into the basement. This caused an enormous explosion, and you were wholly reckless to the damage you may cause to the house, to your neighbours and to their house, and to anyone who might happen to have been close by. When asked to explain what happened by the emergency services in the immediate aftermath, you remained fixated on your self-absorbed belief that Annabel had betrayed you by respecting X's wishes not to tell you or her X's father what had happened to X until she was ready.

22. For murder, the sentence I am required by law to pass is one of life imprisonment. I must determine the minimum time you are to serve before you are eligible to apply to the parole board to be released on licence. In doing so, I have regard to the general principles set out in Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020.
23. Although you stopped your assault, and, I am sure, deliberately chose to walk to the kitchen to find a weapon with which to continue your attack, it is clear on the authorities that this does not of itself bring the murder within subsection 4(1), which relates to an offender taking a weapon to the scene.
24. The relevant subsection is therefore subsection 5. The starting point under section 5 in determining the minimum term is 15 years.
25. I must consider aggravating and mitigating factors.
26. Of those in paragraph 9 of Schedule 21 in force at the time of Annabel's murder, the only aggravating feature to apply directly is the use of sustained and excessive violence. I have already described the evidence of your extreme ferocity.
27. Although not forming part of those set out in paragraph 9, the following further aggravating features exist.

28. The first two are matters to which reporting restrictions apply.

[REDACTED DUE TO REPORTING RESTRICTIONS]

29. The remainder of my remarks are not subject to reporting restrictions.

30. Third, in accordance with the Sentencing Council Guideline “Domestic abuse: overarching guideline”, I find that the domestic context of Annabel’s murder makes the offending considerably more serious. The killing of Annabel was the most extreme abuse of trust conceivable, and was set against a history of regular emotional abuse in the preceding decade.

31. Fourth, the use of a knife. Your decision to fetch a knife from the kitchen was a deliberate one and in itself is a serious aggravating feature.

32. Fifth, the murder was committed when you had been drinking, and this would have been at least some contributory factor to the escalation to violence.

33. Finally, the arson which followed will be a further aggravating feature. I will turn to this shortly.

34. Next I consider the mitigating features. There are few. I am sure you intended to kill Annabel. That is not itself an aggravating feature, but it deprives you of potential mitigation had I accepted that you only intended only to cause really serious harm.

35. I accept that the violent assault ending in Annabel’s murder was not premeditated. On the basis of the facts as I am sure they were, I categorically reject the suggestion by your counsel that there existed provocation falling short of loss of self-control.

36. I take into account the fact that you had no previous convictions prior to the night in question. This must be seen in the context of the longstanding domestic emotional and occasional physical abuse I have described.
37. Whilst you have expressed remorse through your counsel, and expressed this at one point to the psychiatry team shortly after the killing, there was little other sign of it before or during the trial. I make clear that the decision to exercise your right to a jury trial is itself not an aggravating feature; however your plea and the consequent pain and anguish caused to Annabel's family and friends in having to endure the process does not reflect any genuine understanding of or remorse for your actions. It is striking that not once during your evidence, did you say that that you were sorry for what you had done.
38. I accept that at certain aspects of your childhood included traumatic episodes. However, the mitigation this of itself affords in the context of what you have done is limited. I have also read the reference of your younger brother.
39. In relation to the offence of arson, being reckless as to whether life is endangered, there is a specific sentencing guideline which I will follow. In relation to your culpability, I accept that you did not intend to endanger life, but that you were reckless as to whether life was endangered. This is Culpability B.
40. Harm is Category 1, in light of the very high value of damage caused. This has been assessed in the region of £350,000. The starting point for category 1B is 6 years, within a range of 4 to 10 years.
41. This was aggravated by the fact that multiple people were endangered.
42. On the evidence, I am sure that you started releasing gas at a point at which you were not sure the house was empty. In any event,

in circumstances where on any view your neighbours, in the semi-detached property next door, were sleeping at most a few tens of yards from your intended explosion, this is a particularly strong aggravating feature. I am also sure you had in mind that blowing the house up would impact the evidence of what you had done. There is no other conceivable explanation for your decision to put the gas cylinder in the basement directly underneath the living room. I am not sure that you had an intention to impact your children's inheritance.

43. This offending is also aggravated by the fact you had been drinking at the time.
44. In terms of mitigation, the same mitigation in respect of your difficult upbringing and your lack of previous convictions applies. In addition, you pleaded guilty to this offence at the PTPH and are therefore entitled to a credit of 25%.
45. Taking account of aggravating and mitigating factors, had this offence been considered in isolation, an appropriate sentence would have been 8 years after a trial. It would therefore have been 6 years taking into account your guilty plea.
46. I will pass a concurrent sentence in relation to arson, but will take into account that offending as an aggravating feature when deciding the minimum term which you are to serve for murder.
47. I do not simply add the sentence for arson to the minimum term I otherwise would have ordered, but I make a reduction in accordance with the Guideline on Totality.
48. I impose the victim surcharge, and order forfeiture and destruction of the knives seized in evidence.
49. You are entitled to a credit for the number of days you have served on remand. That is 350 days.

Stand up, Clifton George.

50. For the murder of Annabel Rook, the sentence I am required to pass is one of life imprisonment. The minimum time you are to serve before you are eligible to apply to the parole board to be released on licence is 23 years. From this is deducted the 350 days you have already served. That is therefore a term of 22 years and 15 days.
51. For arson, you are sentenced to 6 years imprisonment, to be served concurrently.
52. Whether you are to be released after the minimum term I have ordered is a decision for the Parole Board and will be decided on the basis of whether, at that point, you no longer present a danger. If you remain a danger, you will serve longer than the minimum term, and may never be released. If you are released you will remain liable indefinitely to being recalled to serve the remainder of your sentence, that is until the end of your life, should you breach any of the conditions of your licence.
53. You may be taken from the dock.